

exclusives about the shocking rise in lung cancer in Muslim women, who previously had low rates of the disease.

Poland: coffin nails

Everyone who has seen the classic 1930s movie *Some like it hot* will remember the moment in the opening car chase through the streets of Chicago when police open fire on a hearse-load of gangsters; as the coffin takes a few hits from the police, it becomes evident that it was packed with bottles of illicit alcohol. Something similar happened recently in Poland when a hearse, returning from a journey to deliver a body for burial in neighbouring Ukraine, was subjected to a routine search by border customs officers. But this time the contents were not alcohol, but more than three thousand packs of contraband cigarettes. As if echoing the Chicago scene, a Polish customs spokeswoman said: "We've found liquor in coffins, but cigarettes in a hearse, that's a new one." Perhaps it was a new form of one-stop trading by enterprising undertakers: import cigarettes, sell them, leave your business card, and hope to collect the smoker later for the usual procedures.

Japan: the curious case of the non-smoking underwear

A year ago, we reported on the rising tide of interest and activity in tobacco control in Japan, set against the continuing reluctance of the government, majority owner of the world's third largest tobacco company, to take effective action (see *Tobacco Control* 2003;12:8-10). We also noted the tragedy of Japan having to repeat the grim cycle of recruitment to smoking of its women, who until a mere quarter century ago were almost entirely non-smoking. It was in connection with smoking Japanese women and the desirability of their trying to quit, that a clever piece of commercial promotion swept briefly round the world last November. However, it was not directly focused on smoking cessation as such, but on a new range of underwear.

This is not the first time that Japanese women's underwear has featured in these columns. Readers of our original piece will remember that in Japan, it is common practice for the advertising industry to use western models when promoting products for women that may be considered controversial or embarrassing within Japan's strict cultural traditions, including both cigarettes and underwear. So it was a



Lingerie specially designed to help women stop smoking, bearing no smoking signs.

double surprise to learn that underwear manufacturer Triumph International had designed a range of lingerie designed to help women to stop smoking, and that it had chosen a model who, at least to western eyes, looked distinctly Japanese. The items of underwear, decorated with large no smoking signs and quite modest by western standards, were fitted with pads to contain the fragrances, and these, in an interesting example of Japanese design ingenuity, could apparently be detached and used as facemasks when desired.

The fact that the garments, containing herbal fragrances such as lavender and jasmine to help smokers quit and counteract tobacco odours, were not even for sale, and were called Manifesto in recognition of the then upcoming parliamentary elections, tells us that this was a highly opportunist piece of corporate promotion. But it tells us something else, too. As suggested above in the story about California, an important indication of the likely success of any aspect of tobacco control policy is the way society at large views the issue. So if Triumph's ad agency reckoned that Japan is not only ready to see an ad of a young Japanese woman in her underclothes, but in general is supportive of the notion that she should be trying to stop smoking, it is surely another indication that at long last, tobacco control is gaining ground.

South Africa: PM at the door

Bad news from South Africa: as if the country did not have enough problems, it was reported in December that Philip Morris (PM), which at present only imports its cigarettes, has been exploring the possibility of manufacturing them there. PM's rival, BAT, has more than 90% of the market and PM, which already has a strong presence though its brewing subsidiary, SAB Miller, has been using the argument that BAT is being protected in a near monopoly status, to try to force the kind of entry it wants. Japan Tobacco (JT), too, used similar arguments when it complained recently to the competition commission that BAT was restricting its retail sales, indicating JT's own intentions to try to sell more cigarettes in the beleaguered country.

What really worries health advocates is not so much the reputation of PM as the most ruthless promoter of tobacco; after all, South Africa has the region's leading tobacco control legislation. More worrying is that, according to newspaper reports, in making its bid to a government desperate for economically beneficial investment from overseas, PM is asking for some of the regulations, existing and proposed, to be weakened. For example, it has reportedly been trying to persuade the government to scrap a proposed amendment to the tobacco control law that would ban cigarette displays in shops, saying that such displays would be the only way it could make smokers aware of its brands. It does not seem to have addressed the logical response, namely that the brands are already on the market, so likewise, smokers must already be aware of them. Nor has PM refrained from telling the government that its proposed ban on shop displays, like its high import duties on imported tobacco products—another skittle it wants to knock down—will not help meet the country's public health goals, only maintain BAT's near monopoly.

The argument usually employed by companies trying to open up monopoly markets is that prices will fall, thus benefiting consumers. In this case, even if PM remembered to keep quiet about that one, it is to be hoped that the government realises that this likely outcome would most certainly be against the interests of its health policy. The inappropriateness of a tobacco company advising a government on what will or will not meet health goals does not seem to have struck PM's top executives; but there again, it is unlikely they would be in their jobs if they were sensitive to